

Environmental Audit Committee
House of Commons
Palace of Westminster
London
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Sent by email only to: eacom@parliament.uk

Reply to: mike.daniels@johnmuirtrust.org and
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Dear Committee Members,

Shared Rural Network – consequences of 95% 4G geographical coverage target

We are contacting you on behalf of a coalition of community, conservation and outdoor recreation groups regarding the coverage targets of the Shared Rural Network (SRN). While we fully support the principle of total connectivity coverage for rural communities, business premises and the public road network, we are highly concerned that the programme is based on a geographic target, rather than a needs-based target, which fails to distinguish the clusters of settlement and expanses of land where digital connectivity is not essential to meet the policy outcome. We have specific examples where the consequences of the geographical coverage target are resulting in planning applications for masts in areas of Scotland where there are no roads, business premises or local households that would benefit from the increased mobile coverage.

The consequences of the current scattered, unfocused programme rollout are the under-utilisation of infrastructure and a waste of significant public funds that could be invested in areas where communities are actually in need of increased coverage. Furthermore, there is a high risk of significant, avoidable, harm to nationally important landscapes, protected areas and irreplaceable habitats such as ancient woodland. We are particularly concerned about applications where new access tracks are being proposed in wild and remote areas, as these will significantly impact the character of the landscape.

We have already met with the SRN team and representatives of the Operators, and have approached Ofcom Scotland to seek an adjustment to the SRN delivery programme, but none of them can offer a review of the target coverage, given their limited responsibilities to only deliver the programme and assess the compliance with the coverage respectively. It is within the UK Government's powers to review the geographical target.

We would therefore like to kindly appeal to the Environmental Audit Committee to consider the potential environmental consequences of this programme and to write to the Minister of Data and Digital Infrastructure to ask for a pause on the roll-out of the programme and a review of the approach.

We would be more than happy to provide more information if the Members consider it necessary, and we would be grateful to know if a letter to the Minister on behalf of the Committee would be possible.

We appreciate your consideration.

Yours sincerely

Mike Daniels
Head of Policy
John Muir Trust

Stuart Younie
Chief Executive Officer
Mountaineering Scotland

On behalf of

Action to Protect Rural Scotland

Community Land Scotland

John Muir Trust

Mountaineering Scotland

North-East Mountain Trust

Ramblers Scotland

Scottish Wild Land Group

The Knoydart Foundation

The Munro Society

The National Trust for Scotland

Woodland Trust Scotland